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Spotlighting Teen Issues

for
Parents

Talking About Sex

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Are you an “ask-able” and connected parent? Providing your teen with information on sexuality is one of the most important responsibilities of parenthood. Research shows that too many parents avoid talking openly with their teen about sex and health because they’re embarrassed or don’t know how to start the conversation. Despite your understandable discomfort with the subject, you can’t afford to leave sex education to television, magazines, movies or other teens. Also, not having these important discussions leaves teens vulnerable to the unrealistic sexual messages they get from advertising, music and videos every day.

Parents should be a teen’s best and most accurate source of information about sexuality. You can help your teen separate fact from fiction, and you are in the best position to convey values about healthy sexuality and loving relationships. In many different studies, teenagers indicate that they really want guidance about sexuality from their parents.

Most teens feel uncomfortable asking their parents questions about sex. So, instead of talking to their parents, teens get most of their information about sex from friends, TV and the movies. Unfortunately, much of what they learn is wrong!

Suggestions for Parents

- **Discussion of sexuality is a continuing process**, not a one-time event.
- **It’s normal to feel uncomfortable** but try to make thoughts, feelings and questions seem normal.
- **Sexuality includes information on many different topics:** sexual intercourse and intimacy; sexual identity; sexual health and reproduction (our reproductive systems, anatomy), sensuality (accepting one’s body and acknowledging our physical attractions and desires); and our attitudes and feelings about our sexuality.
- **Be an “ask-able” parent** so your teens will know you are there to answer their questions. Listen first, then you can ask questions.
- **Be honest.** Clarify your own thoughts and feelings and the messages you wish to communicate. Don’t share just information, but also share your feelings and values.
- **Talk with (not at) your teens.** Decisions about sexuality can have lifelong effects. Remember — this is real life, and it’s time for real talk.

Who Influences Teens’ Sexual Decisions the Most?	
Parents	45%
Friends	31%
Religious Leaders	7%
Teachers	6%
Media	4%

(Source: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy)



To make healthy choices, teens need to

- Know they are important to their parents
- Be optimistic about the future
- Be involved in healthy family, school, and community activities
- Know the facts about sex, teen pregnancy, teen parenthood and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- Have the skills and support systems (parents, teachers and/or other adults) to say “no”

What do teens think about teen sex?

- More than half of all teens say that teens shouldn't have sex.
- Nearly three out of four teens don't think it is embarrassing to say they are a virgin.
- Two-thirds of teens who have had sex wish they had waited.
- Nine out of 10 teens think it is important for society to send a strong message that teens should wait at least until they are out of high school to have sex.

Teen Pregnancy

There is evidence that teens are changing. Teen pregnancies are decreasing, and many young people are deliberately avoiding early sexual activity. In 1991, 54 percent of high school teens said they had ever had sex. In 2005 that number dropped to 47 percent. Teens are becoming aware of the problems of teen sex, and many are making good decisions. You are key to helping your teen decide to wait for sex.

Did You Know?

Babies born to teen mothers are more likely to

- Be born too small or die during the first year of life
- Have chronic health problems
- Have learning and school problems
- Get in trouble with the law
- Become teen parents themselves

Teens Who Become Parents

- Are more likely to end up poor or on welfare;
- Have fewer job opportunities
- Have fewer educational opportunities
- Are less likely to marry

Talking About Abstinence

Here are some suggestions you can make to support a teen who is choosing to abstain from sexual activity. (from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy)

- Choose friends who respect your decisions and share your values.
- Avoid situations and people who pressure you to have sex.
- Find non-sexual ways to show you care (give a card or a nice comment).
- Find a keepsake to use as a daily reminder of your decision, such as a ring, necklace or a pocket stone.

For More Information

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
<http://www.teenpregnancy.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Sexually Transmitted Diseases at <http://www.cdc.gov/node.do/id/0900f3ec80009a98>
HIV/AIDS Among Youth at <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/youth.htm>

Body Health Resources Corp. The Impact of Parent-Teen Communication on Adolescent Sexual Behavior.
<http://www.thebody.com/siecus/parents.html>

Troubledwith: a Web site of the Focus on the Family Institute
<http://www.troubledwith.com>

References

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Haffner, Debra W. (2001). *Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Health Teens - From Middle School to High School and Beyond*. New York, NY: New Market Press.

Harris, Robie H. (2001). *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex & Sexual Health*. Cambridge, MASS: Candlewick Press.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Survey at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbss/>

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